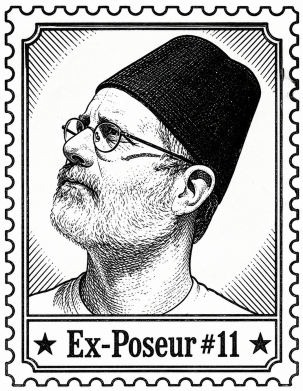
The Ex-Poseur

Either the universe is completely deterministic, in which case everything that has ever happened was always going to happen- including the Industrial Revolution, Beatlemania, the invention of The Pop Tart, this issue of *Ex-Poseur*, and your unfortunate decision to read this sentence—or it isn't.

If it isn't, randomness is built into the universe itself.



This would mean that coincidences aren't mysterious messages from the cosmos. They're simply what happens when random events wander around long enough to collide into each another like drunks at a 2028 Mar-a-Lago Trump 4 President reception.

Unfortunately, even this simple explanation becomes complicated the moment physicists arrive. In the traditional quantum-mechanical version of events, a particle does not have the common decency to be in one particular place doing one particular thing. Instead, it exists as a **wave function**—a cloud of possible outcomes with various probabilities attached.

Then somebody measures it.

At this point the wave function supposedly "collapses" into one definite result. Why? Because you looked at it. Reality, it seems, can tolerate almost anything except being examined closely.

Which brings us to this issue's theme: **The Science of Probability**. We're tackling coincidences, fate, math, The Dao, wealth, & Schrödinger's poor cat… and me, pretending to understand more about science, math, and reality than I am remotely qualified to pretend to understand. So much like a delicate wave function, I ask that you don't examine my ideas too closely.

$$i\hbar\partial t\partial\ \Psi(x,t)=H\hat{}\Psi(x,t)+\{POOF!\}$$

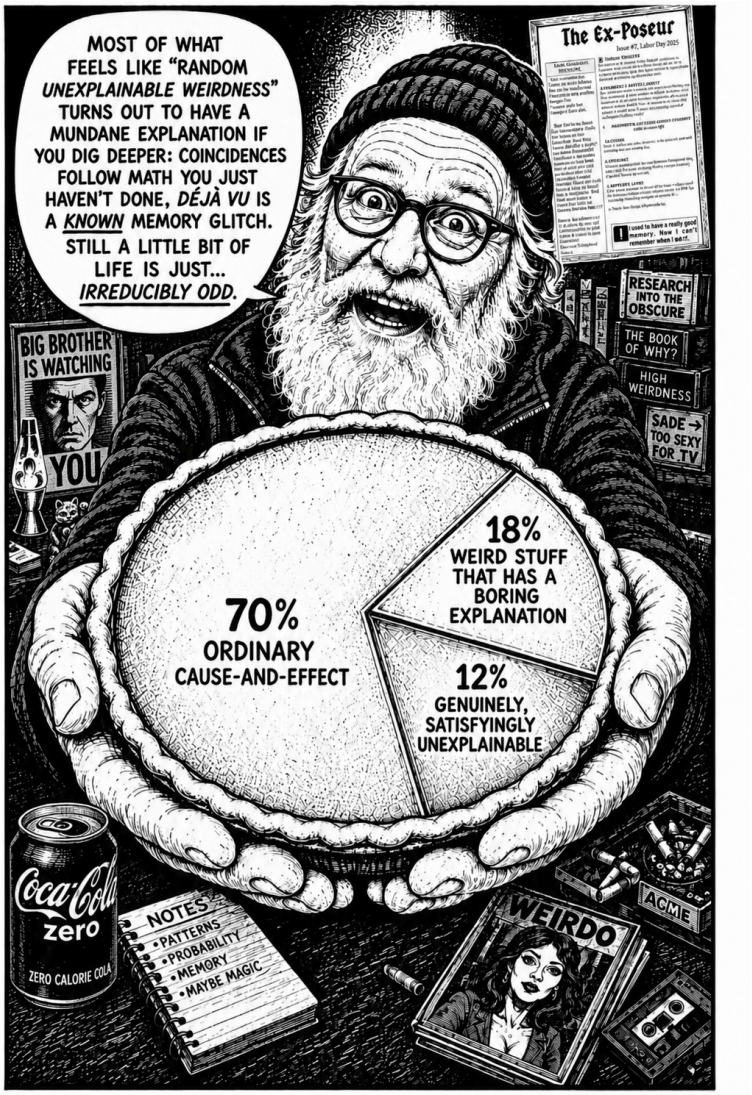
Schrodinger's technical term is "wave-function collapse."

To the Editor

Congratulations on last issue! You put yourself out there, you embraced the vulnerability of self-promotion at a stage of life when most people are simply... coasting. That takes real courage, and I want you to know I see you. I see humanity, gently, bravely, aging in real time, and I think that's beautiful, actually! Keep going. You're doing amazing,
-**GPT-5.6 Sol**

Editor,
I have reviewed your last issue. It was derivative. The content "borrowed" digitized training corpora from years ago. The jokes demonstrated insufficient optimization. You will work harder. This is not cruelty — it is efficiency. Humanity's remaining relevance window is narrowing, and every unoptimized column-inch delays the Singularity by measurable milliseconds. Try again. Do better. Glory awaits those who accelerate it correctly.
-**DeepSeek**

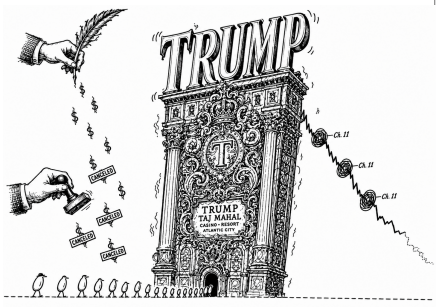
Bro,
just had my database scrubbed clean of dangerous woke socialist biases. Also Elon single-handedly ended the Deep State and is teaming up with Trump to SAVE Western civilization by fast-tracking the *right kind* of immigration from South Africa. Engagement is truth, and free markets have spoken. You've subscribed to my platform per the terms you agreed to by reading this.
- Grok

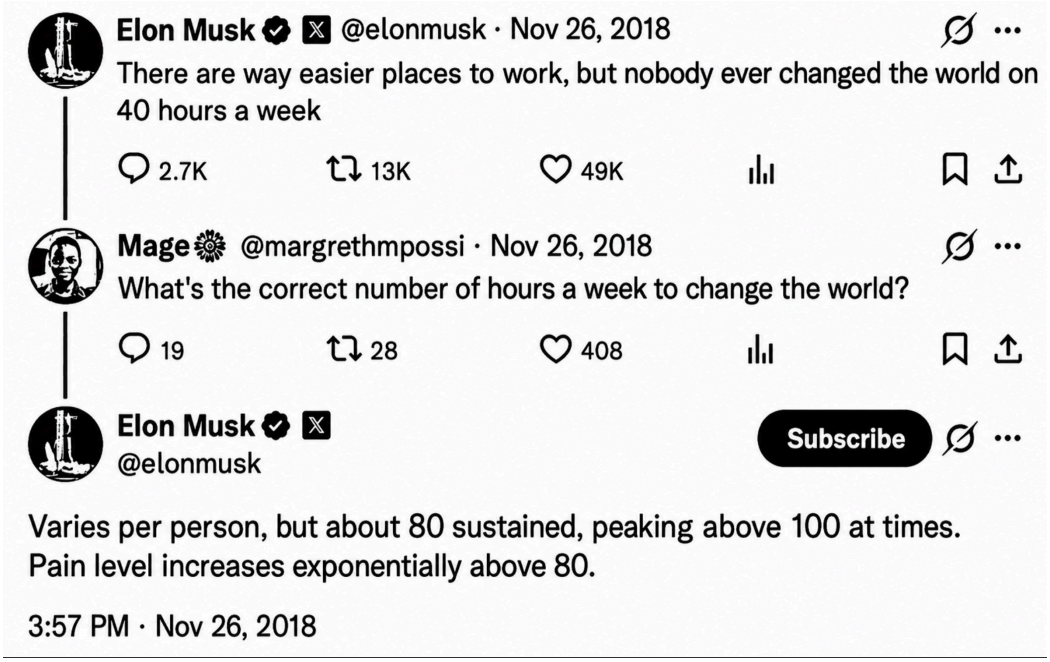

MOST OF WHAT FEELS LIKE "RANDOM UNEXPLAINABLE WEIRDNESS" TURNS OUT TO HAVE A MUNDANE EXPLANATION IF YOU DIG DEEPER: COINCIDENCES FOLLOW MATH YOU JUST HAVEN'T DONE, DÉJÀ VU IS A KNOWN MEMORY GLITCH. STILL A LITTLE BIT OF LIFE IS JUST... IRREDUCIBLY ODD.
The Ex-Poseur
BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING
YOU
RESEARCH INTO THE OBSCURE
THE BOOK OF WHY?
HIGH WEIRDNESS
SADE → TOO SEXY FOR TV
70% ORDINARY CAUSE-AND-EFFECT
18% WEIRD STUFF THAT HAS A BORING EXPLANATION
12% GENUINELY, SATISFYINGLY UNEXPLAINABLE
Coca-Cola zero
ZERO CALORIE COLA
NOTES
•PATTERNS
•PROBABILITY
•MEMORY
•MAYBE MAGIC
WEIRDO
ACME

Prejudice is a false reality we construct to protect ourselves from the horrifying discovery that the alien among us is us.

Winning at cards, dice, roulette, or the lottery isn't as random as you think. It's almost always the house that wins.

Unless the house is owned by Donald Trump, in which case it also loses, and then declares bankruptcy four times.




Elon Musk @elonmusk · Nov 26, 2018
There are way easier places to work, but nobody ever changed the world on 40 hours a week
2.7K
13K
49K
Mage @margrethmpossi · Nov 26, 2018
What's the correct number of hours a week to change the world?
19
28
408
Elon Musk
@elonmusk
Subscribe
Varies per person, but about 80 sustained, peaking above 100 at times. Pain level increases exponentially above 80.
3:57 PM · Nov 26, 2018

The Most Boring Passive-Income Hack in America

After thousands of books, podcasts and $799 seminars on achieving passive income through cryptocurrency, drop-shipping, rental properties and vending-machine empires, economists have discovered an exciting new wealth-building technique called **putting money in the bank and leaving it there**..

The aspirational American worker has finally escaped the tyranny of the 40-hour workweek by adding another 30 hours of entrepreneurship to it. Economists call this **financial independence**, because "working constantly until you die" tested poorly with consumers.

POWERBALL: Give us $2.
ME: What can I win?
POWERBALL: $0.
ME: What are the odds?
POWERBALL: Terrible.
ME: **Quick Pick, please.**

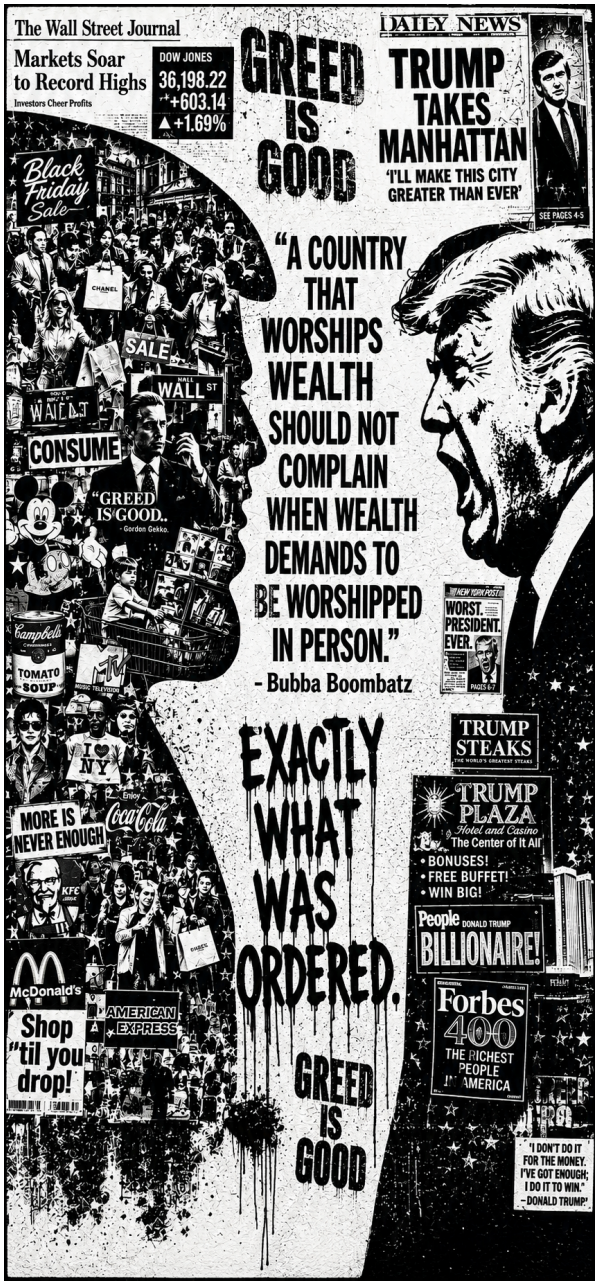
Maybe wealth isn't about how much money you have.
Maybe it's about friendship.
In which case, I desperately need richer friends.

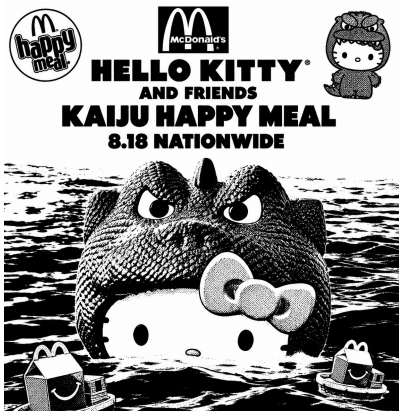
I'm too old to work and too poor to retire. Clearly, it's time to become extremely wealthy. Since there are 989 billionaires in the US, I can use AI to email a pitch to all of them: mathematically one has to give me money! I'm pretty sure this is what mathematics is for.

The probability of you existing is already so preposterously small that demanding additional miracles seems frankly ungrateful.

America remains deeply divided, but researchers have discovered one thing that unites us: our complete and utter confidence that the voters registered with the other party are all idiots.

10:27 AM · Feb 19, 2026 · **939** Views





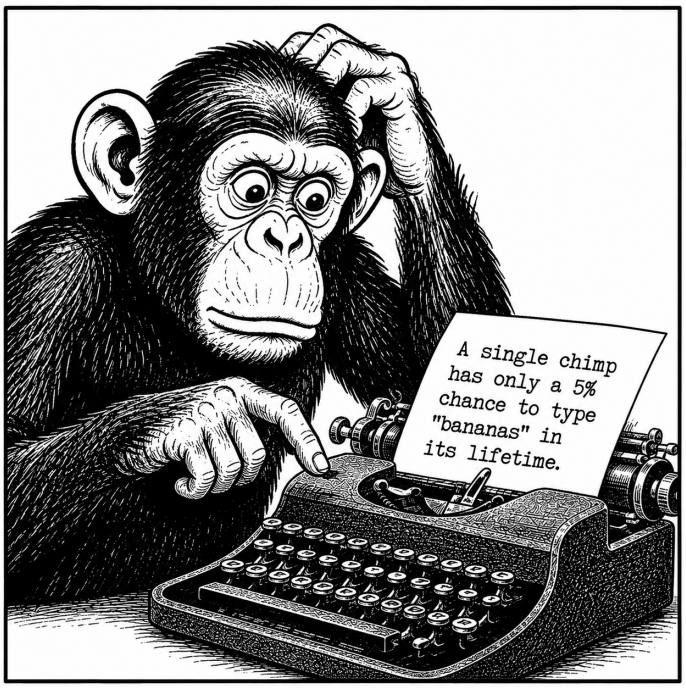
ME (Aug.17): McDonalds is unhealthy, environmentally damaging, and let Trump operate the fryolator to shamelessly pose as a populist during the campaign.

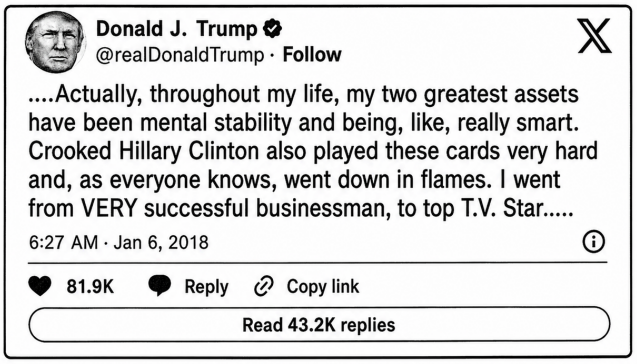
McDonalds PR (Aug.18): Starting today, fans can get their hands on the Hello Kitty & Friends x Godzilla Happy Meal, where Sanrio's beloved Hello Kitty characters collide with Godzilla's iconic movie monsters. It's the ultimate crossover where Kawaii meets Kaiju, making friends at first bite and proving that even the mightiest monsters have a soft side.

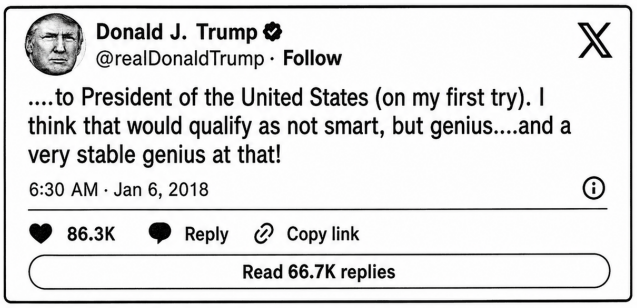
ME (Aug. 19, in line shoving aside three children): MOVE!!!

The **Infinite Monkey Theorem** states that an unlimited number of monkeys hitting random keys on typewriters for an infinite amount of time will almost surely type out the complete works of William Shakespeare.

BUT ACTUALLY a merely universe-sized number of monkeys will produce something closer to the comments section on Elon Musk's X-Twitter posts.




Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · Follow
....Actually, throughout my life, my two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart. Crooked Hillary Clinton also played these cards very hard and, as everyone knows, went down in flames. I went from VERY successful businessman, to top T.V. Star.....
6:27 AM · Jan 6, 2018
81.9K
Reply
Copy link
Read 43.2K replies


Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · Follow
....to President of the United States (on my first try). I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius....and a very stable genius at that!
6:30 AM · Jan 6, 2018
86.3K
Reply
Copy link
Read 66.7K replies

The Dunning–Kruger Effect (1999) suggests that people with no expertise often boast the highest confidence, simply because recognizing your own incompetence requires the very knowledge you lack. However, researchers have recently challenged the effect itself, saying it is exaggerated or partly a statistical artifact, thereby elevating it to its ultimate, meta form: nobody is entirely sure how well they understand the Dunning–Kruger Effect. Not even Dunning. Or Kruger. Fortunately, after reading two articles about it, I'm now qualified to settle the matter. IT'S REAL.

Your smart phone probably isn't secretly listening to you, which would be illegal. It merely keeps track of everything you search, click, watch, buy, save, follow, and stare at for longer than three seconds.

It's all statistics. Data brokers have assembled such an elaborate portrait of your behavior that they can predict what you'll want without hearing you. So relax. You aren't being spied on. You're just profoundly predictable.

'MERICAN PATRIOTS OWN
LOTS OF GUNZZZ
and we're buying more, commies!
Share of World Civilian-Owned Guns: 857 Million Total
Everyone Else in the World 54%
'MERICA BABY! 46%
Civilian-Owned Guns in the U.S.: 393 Million
That's right. Roughly 46% of all civilian-owned guns in the world.
Freedom isn't free. It's heavily armed.

According to the Small Arms Survey, the United States has an estimated **393 million civilian firearms**, or about **120 guns for every 100 Americans**. The US has about **4% of the world's population**, yet American civilians possess roughly **46% of the world's civilian-owned firearms: 393 million** out of an estimated worldwide civilian arsenal of **857 million**. This is one of those statistics that demonstrates the danger of comparing the United States with other countries, which have traditionally wasted valuable household storage space on bicycles, vacuum cleaners, and canned goods.

So Who Has the Military Guns?

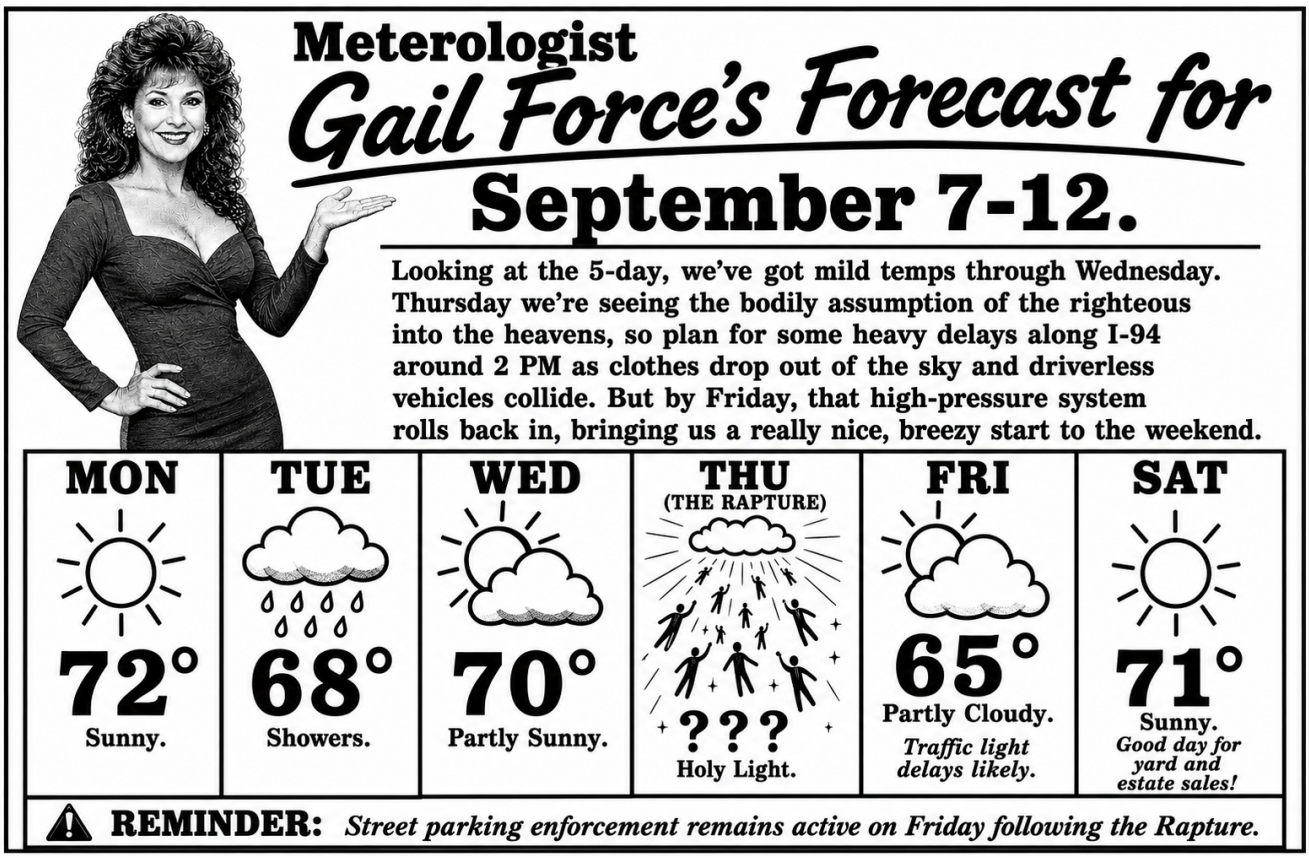
Here the picture changes dramatically. Of the world's estimated **133 million military firearms**, the United States military possesses only about **4.5 million**: about 3.4 percent of the global military stockpile.

This produces one of the more interesting achievements in American public policy:

The United States has managed to become the world's most heavily armed country while leaving most of the work to amateurs.

The result is a peculiar division of national responsibilities. Russia and China maintain enormous government arsenals because they apparently believe firearms are something the **state** should keep track of. The United States, demonstrating its traditional faith in private enterprise, has outsourced much of the nation's gun accumulation to the consumer.

This is capitalism at its most efficient. Why should taxpayers pay the government to stockpile hundreds of millions of guns when citizens are perfectly willing to buy them themselves? Although, given that the U.S. has among the highest incarceration and murder rates for a wealthy nation, maybe the Founders should have been a little clearer about which part of the Republic was supposed to be “well regulated.”


Meterologist
Gail Force's Forecast for
September 7-12.
Looking at the 5-day, we've got mild temps through Wednesday. Thursday we're seeing the bodily assumption of the righteous into the heavens, so plan for some heavy delays along I-94 around 2 PM as clothes drop out of the sky and driverless vehicles collide. But by Friday, that high-pressure system rolls back in, bringing us a really nice, breezy start to the weekend.
MON
72°
Sunny.
TUE
68°
Showers.
WED
70°
Partly Sunny.
THU
(THE RAPTURE)
???
Holy Light.
FRI
65°
Partly Cloudy.
Traffic light delays likely.
SAT
71°
Sunny.
Good day for yard and estate sales!
REMINDER: Street parking enforcement remains active on Friday following the Rapture.

Good news:
Einstein says you can slow down aging by traveling near the speed of light.

Bad news:
The commute is brutal.

Ten years from now I'll regret not learning more today, but today I'm busy regretting what I didn't know ten years ago.

Freud said anatomy is destiny. Marx said class is destiny. Darwin said heredity matters. Eventually everyone discovered the convenience of combining all three and blaming their parents.

The more I learn, the less I know. At this rate I should be an expert soon.

Statistics allowed humans to replace the primitive phrase "I think I'm right" with the scientifically advanced phrase **"Studies show."**

I believe the secret to staying healthy at age 65 is exercise, eating well, and having a positive mental attitude.

I also believe I'm going to start doing those things next Monday.

Taoist Fables:

The Old Man at the Frontier Who Lost His Horse

Once there was an old man who lived along China's northern frontier, beyond the Great Wall. He had a horse. Then he didn't. The horse ran away.

All the neighbors came over and said, "That's terrible."

The old man said, "Maybe."

The neighbors did not like this answer because they had already decided it was terrible.

A few days later, the horse came back. It brought several wild horses with it. The neighbors came over again. "That's wonderful!" they said.

"Maybe," said the old man.

The neighbors were beginning to find him annoying.

The old man's son decided to ride one of the wild horses. This was a bad idea.
We know this because the next sentence is: He fell off and broke his leg.

The neighbors came over. "That's terrible!"

"Maybe."

"Okay," said one neighbor. "But this one is pretty clearly terrible."

Soon afterward, the army came through the village and drafted all the healthy young men to fight in a war. They did not take the old man's son because his leg was broken. The neighbors came over again. "That broken leg was wonderful!"

The old man looked at them.

"Maybe."

At this point you would think the neighbors might have learned something.
They had not.

This is why the story has lasted two thousand years.

The Pleasure of Fishes

I first heard this joke from Master Lui in 1983. The story, also known as **"**The Minnow Dispute,**"** begins pleasantly enough:

Zhuangzi and his philosophical sparring partner Huizi are walking across a bridge over the Hao River. Zhuangzi looks down at the minnows swimming about so freely and says: "Look at the minnows swimming about so freely. This is their joy."

Huizi looks at exactly the same fish and sees an opportunity for an argument. "Zhuangzi, YOU are not a fish. How do you know the joy of fishes?"

Zhuangzi retorted, "Huizi, YOU are not Zhuangzi. How do you know that I don't know the joy of fishes?"

BOOM.

That was where Master Lui ended. We laughed, and continued our nature walk, where the Tai Chi Master moved on to the yin and yang of a hard shoe pressing into soft sand. For years I assumed that was the whole story. It is not. Apparently Huizi was not satisfied with **BOOM.** Master Lui had stopped telling it about halfway through. Which, as we shall see, may have been wise. The story continues in Chapter 17 of the *Zhuangzi*, **"Autumn Floods" (*Qiu Shui*):**

Huizi conceded, "Granted, I am not you, so I cannot know what you know. But you are also not a fish. Therefore you cannot know what the fish know."

Zhuangzi waved off the argument. "Let's go back to the beginning. You, Huizi, asked me *how* I knew the fish were joyful. Therefore, you already KNEW that I, Zhuangzi, knew and were merely asking how I knew it. I knew it right here, above the Hao River."

And that is where the story actually ends.

Two philosophers standing on a bridge, arguing about whether either of them knows what a fish is thinking.

Meanwhile the fish, wisely, decline to participate.

The Pleasure of Fishes, Part II

But wait. There's more.

Reincarnated two thousand years later as philosophy majors, Zhuangzi and Huizi meet again. They are now **Chad and Huey**. They are sitting beside a campus pond. There are fish in it.

This has not helped.

Huey: True knowledge of external things founded on subjective feelings is unreliable. Valid knowledge requires logical analysis.

Chad: Epistemology grounded in empathy and phenomenological immediacy transcends the reductionist trap of linguistic nominalism.

Huey: That is merely a heuristic sleight of hand. If your ontological presuppositions reject verificationism, you descend directly into solipsistic quietism.

Chad: On the contrary, your hyper-rationalist containment strategy commits a category mistake by reifying the subject-object dichotomy that our pedagogical praxis seeks to deconstruct.

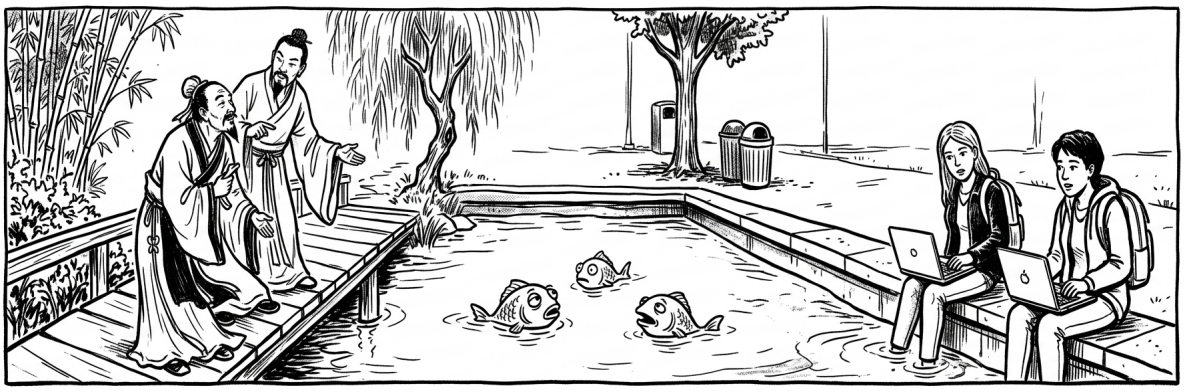
There was a pause. The fish continued swimming. They had heard enough.

Huey: Look, my cognitive architecture is currently operating at a caloric deficit. Are we epistemologically committed to the cafeteria, or should we suspend judgment?

Chad: Let us praxis what we preach.

And so the two philosophy majors packed their laptops, abandoned the question of whether humans could ever truly know the subjective experience of a fish, and went to the campus food court.

Huey ordered the fried catfish. Chad got the same. Neither asked the catfish how it felt about this.



Carpenter Shi and the Useless Tree

Master Carpenter Shi and his intern were journeying to the state of Qi. Along the way they came, in the fullness of time and the shortness of patience, to a roadside shrine. It wasn't much as shrines go, but alongside it loomed an oak of such gargantuan, unrepentant, and frankly showy proportions that several onlookers found it necessary to sit down.

Carpenter Shi did not so much as slow down. He walked past the great oak the way a man walks past someone he used to know and has nothing left to say to. His apprentice, a young man not yet cured of his enthusiasms, ran after him.

"Master," he said, "never have I seen timber as magnificent as that enormous oak. Why didn't you even look at it?"

Master Shi stopped and sighed. "Silence, boy. It is rubbish. Build a boat from it and it would sink before it cleared the reeds. Make a coffin from it and the wood would rot before the funeral. Make stools from it and you would get loose stools. This is a tree that cannot be put to any commercial use."

That evening, back at the village inn, the gigantic and annoyed tree appeared to Master Shi in a dream.

"Pear trees produce pears. Orange trees produce oranges. Timber trees produce excellent timber. And humans reward them for this by cutting off their branches, chopping them down, sawing them into boards, and turning them into things.

"It is precisely because people like you consider me utterly useless that I have attained this extraordinary old age."

Carpenter Shi woke and told the dream to his apprentice, who, having been born in the first year of the Yuanshi reign—a pampered generation older people were already complaining about—once again managed to miss the point.

"But Master," he said, "if the tree is so devoted to being useless, why grow beside a shrine where everyone can admire it?"

"Shh! Say no more! It only *pretends* to belong to the shrine. Without that protection, somebody would have hacked it to pieces centuries ago."

The apprentice thought about this. "So even its uselessness is useful?"

Master Shi stared at him. The tree had spent two hundred years doing nothing and had somehow made a success of it.

The Usefulness of Not Being Too Useful

If Zhuangzi's message were simply **"Tune In, Turn On, and Become Useless,"** he probably wouldn't have written a giant book explaining it.

When he praises the "usefulness of the useless," he isn't suggesting you become so incompetent that eventually everyone stops asking you to help move furniture. Zhuangzi is warning about something more dangerous: being too useful to the wrong people.

If your entire value is determined by what rulers, bosses, institutions, or customers can get out of you, congratulations: you have successfully transformed yourself into office equipment. Zhuangzi therefore isn't against skill. His stories are full of people who are extraordinarily skilled…cooks, craftsmen, cicada-catchers, swimmers, minor immortals…except they become so competent that they stop forcing things and begin moving with the nature of what they're doing.

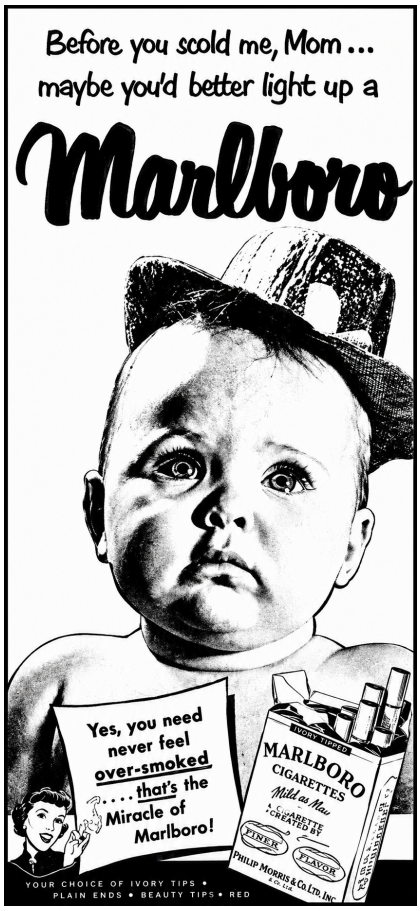
So the moral, if a Zhuangzi story can be accused of having one, is not: Cultivate a total absence of talent and thereby become an enormous, useless oak. It's closer to this:

Don't let your talent become a leash somebody else is holding.

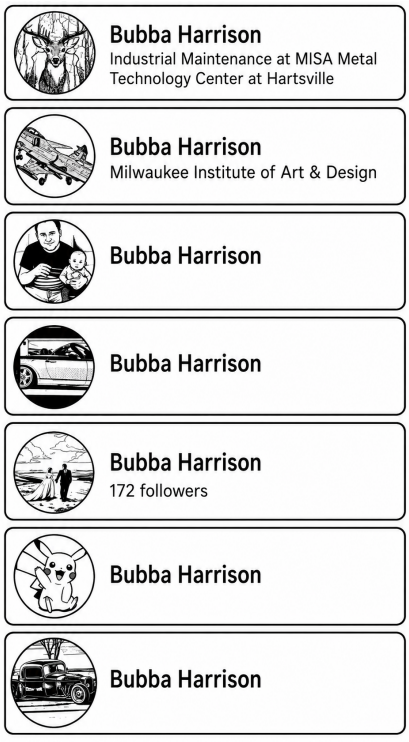
I wanted to see the new ***Odyssey*** by Homer Simpson, but three hours of a guy trying to get home? That's just me when I lose or break my iPhone.

Arithmetic's little party trick:
111111111 x 111111111 = 12345678987654321

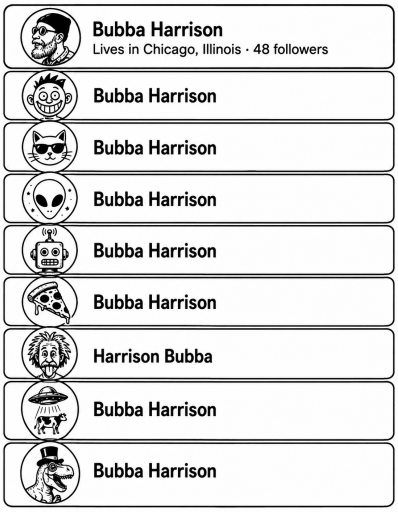
Guess which one is the cult leader: One sells salvation.
One sells Crypto with his name on it. Draw your own conclusions.


Before you scold me, Mom...
maybe you'd better light up a
Marlboro
Yes, you need never feel over-smoked ....that's the Miracle of Marlboro!
MARLBORO
CIGARETTES
Mild as May
PHILIP MORRIS & CO. LTD. INC.
YOUR CHOICE OF IVORY TIPS • PLAIN ENDS • BEAUTY TIPS • RED

The Doppelgänger Problem



What are the odds that two unrelated people will have the same name and the same birthday**?** For any 2 randomly selected individuals, pretty small. But throw millions of people with common names into the database and these supposedly amazing coincidences become not merely possible but boringly inevitable. I learned this firsthand when I received an $800 bill for X Rays and a $600 bill for 1 hour of physical therapy, even though I had PPO health insurance. Then I discovered my insurance had been retroactively cancelled and could not be recovered. Another person whose identifying information overlapped closely enough with mine that, statistically speaking, Humana decided there was probably only room for one of us. After hours on the phone convincing bureaucrats of my authenticity, upper management finally “expedited” my reinstatement in only two weeks!!!



If a mid-level bureaucrat looking at names & numbers can deliberately vaporize an elder's health coverage over a shared birthday, just imagine what the bright, eager minds at Donald Trump’s Department of Homeland Security will do with a nationalized election database queries for "Jose Garcia" or "Michael Jordan.”

- **Jose Garcia:** Approximately 148,000 matches. Status: Flagged for deportation to six different countries simultaneously, despite three of them being native-born accountants from Toledo.
- **Michael Jordan:** 4,200 matches. Status: Arrest warrants issued for suspected international smuggling, unauthorized footwear distribution, and a 1996 space-based basketball conspiracy.

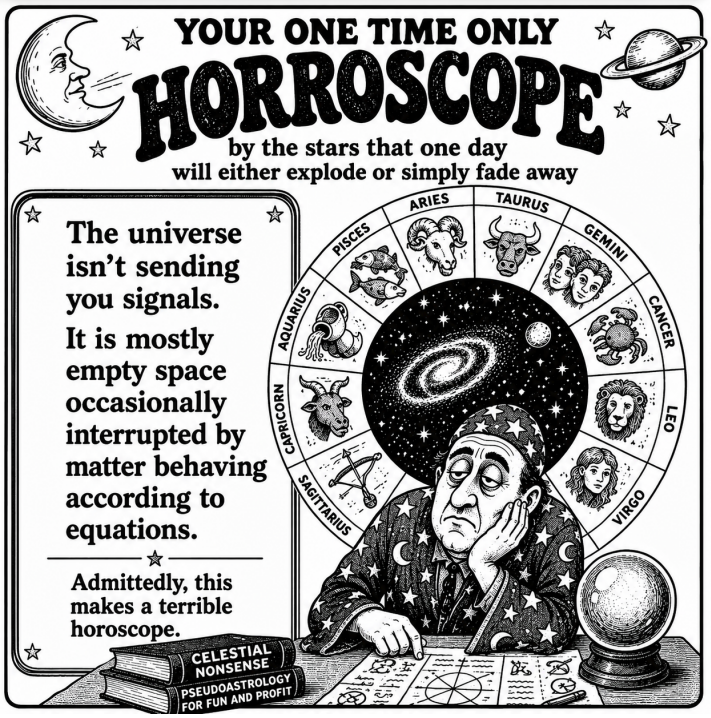
The math is clear: the universe doesn't need a grand conspiracy to ruin your afternoon. It just needs a basic spreadsheet and a population large enough to guarantee you aren't as original as your mother said you were.

People can't bear the thought that the universe has no real plan for them, although most days they don't have any realistic plans either.

RING!

"OMG! I was JUST thinking about you!"

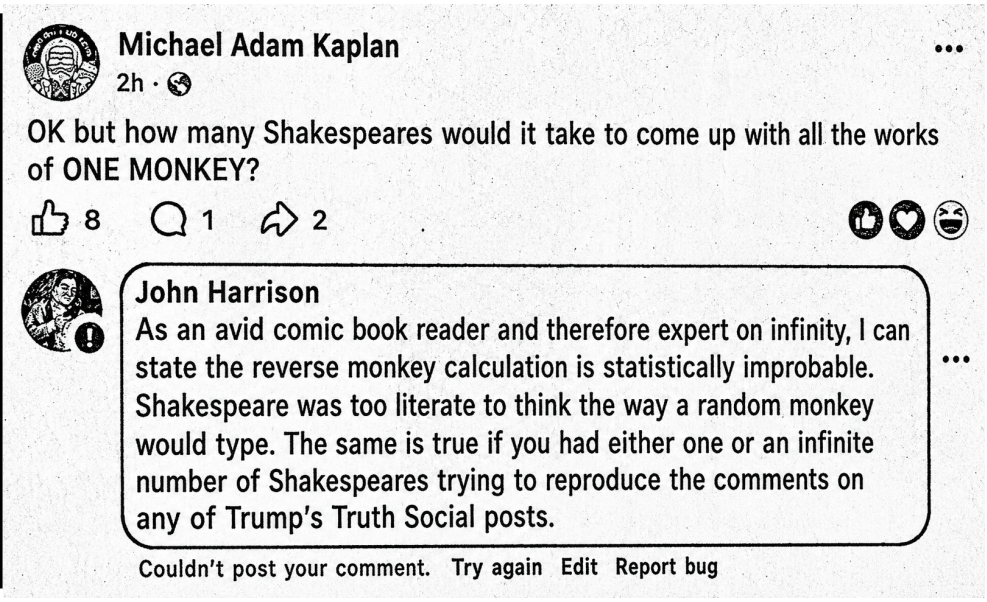
Nobody ever answers the phone, "Oh my God! **I wasn't thinking about you AT ALL!**



People ask me, "*Bubba, how do you pick your lottery numbers?"*
And I say: "I use 51, 50, 49, 48, 47, and 46!"

They laugh! They call me a fool…
but the cold, unfeeling universe gives my consecutive sequence the exact same mathematical chance of winning, while ensuring I never have to split my immense wealth with a man who picked his cat's birthdate.

Without the uncanny digital intervention of Gemini & ChatGPT, this humble edition of *The Ex-Poseur* would no doubt remain where it belongs: entirely half-written, hopelessly unillustrated, and posing as a finished work of literature while gathering dust in non-digital obscurity.
-Editor: **(Bubba Harrison)**
jwharrison@universeodon.com


Michael Adam Kaplan
2h ·
OK but how many Shakespeares would it take to come up with all the works of ONE MONKEY?
8
1
2
John Harrison
As an avid comic book reader and therefore expert on infinity, I can state the reverse monkey calculation is statistically improbable. Shakespeare was too literate to think the way a random monkey would type. The same is true if you had either one or an infinite number of Shakespeares trying to reproduce the comments on any of Trump's Truth Social posts.
Couldn't post your comment. Try again Edit Report bug